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VERSES TO AVOID

CECIL ALLEN

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VERSES TO AVOID

By
CECIL ALLEN

London:
ARTHUR H. STOCKWELL,
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L423 V4

With a vivid Sense

of increasing Gratitude

This little string of trifles would naturally

Dedicate itself to the Lady of Mirth

I have most reason to admire,

SIGNORA MAMOLA.

EXPLANATORY FOREWORD.

We all know that instinctive shrinking feeling, when some venturesome soul advances with manuscript in hand, and requests you of your clemency to take hold, and read his verse. There is the inevitable presentiment, followed perhaps by a reluctant acquiescence—or more frequently, the politely-framed excuse that your intellect doesn't feel equal to the task, not at the moment—some other day perhaps, when in the mood. Some other time! The writer of this slight selection has every sympathy. He has never been able to overcome this same innate dread of the unknown, even after familiarity has engendered a certain tolerance of any virile, but virulent, versewright's style.

The prospective reader, then, if contemplating purchase has fair warning. There is good reason for such a title as the aforesaid. It is an unknown realm that lies in the following leaves. That realm should, in fact as well as fancy, be rife with the rapture of rhythm; but it may be found, not only without sunshine, but without form, and void of substance.

In that event you will not get your money back.

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THE FAILURE OF SUCCESS.

" To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive."
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

NOTE :—Fancy, tho' free to fly in all directions, will only be drawn by what attracts. One cannot but admire what is admirable, and the writer is led to touch on Robert Louis Stevenson's dictum after reading the exquisite, and standard, illustration of this text by " Mr. Punch," in his " Studies of Blighted Lives "—" The Penalty of Achievement." (*Reprinted in the volume "A Harvest of Chaff."*)

I met a Singer—much to my amaze,
A Seer of ready Muse, second to none,
Prime master in the lore of lyric lays,
Serious, but full of fun.

I 'shunned : his tethered monocle sheer dropped.
" Er—S.O.S." (invocative) I sighed,
" It's like my nerve to mention, now I've stopped,
I've studied lives that died—

" Whose *joie de vivre* was blasted in the bud,
Whose blither hopes were blighted ere in bloom.
' He sought to make a name, but died a dud '—
Rough epitaph for tomb.

" But they're *in luck,* if looked at in the light
Of chagrin felt by writers who ' arrive.'
Do say that R.L.S. was hardly right
—That fancied joys survive :

" That there *is* tonic in the goal attained—
Sublime reward with harvest gathered in—
That, travelling hopefully, men more have gained
Than they set out to win.

" What use of faith, fruition missing fire!
What value works, achieved thro' strictest strife?
Are bards so full of unfulfilled desire
They'd rather fail in life?"

* * * * * *

He waited patiently, then made reply
(His voice seemed vibrant with a latent vim)
" I can't resist your dexter errant eye
It has so glum a glim.

" I hold no brief for Robert's poignant *mot*.
A thing of beauty's none the worse for wear.
It's hard to say, exactly, what is so
When neither here nor there.

" The soul of Art is built on Actual Truth
(For which read Beauty—KEATS was so cocksure)
But life has added, for the years of youth,
Illusion's subtle lure.

" A sense of values may not always seem
To be the same when, what was far, is near.
Detachment helps to scan the cosmic scheme
As in a mirror clear.

" Intriguing prospects—are they patent views?
And Distance adds enchantment to an Age.
Yet veriest verse would hardly veil the Muse."
Whereat I thanked the Sage:

And wandered off, with soul too full for song,
And well content to ponder, lost in thought,
Until a policeman bade me pass along
And go the way I ought.

THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE.

(A leaf out of the book of Revue).

Lady sings: SAY you look right into the eyes
Of one demure like me—
What sort of view d'you see?
Wilt gaze beyond their guise
Of seeming fancy-free?
(I've lost my heart to three).
And should a tale they tell,
You'll guard the secret well
Of a look right into the eyes.

Man hesitating: *'Say'* I look right into your eyes
I'd see transplendent things!—
Magnetic, radiant rings
Of quite elastic size.
Thro' limpid lens light springs—
Crystal imaginings.
Is that a heart on view?
No, no! I wait the cue.
SAY "I'll look right into your eyes!"

Lady, not noticing: When a light looks into some eyes
There is such beautiful thought
In their soft shadows caught!
In shrines of rapture rise
Hope, Laughter, Love, but naught
That might occur care-fraught.
As in a mirror, too,
Splashes of Heaven's hue,
When a light looks into some eyes

Man, roused : I have just glanced into your eyes!
Twin rays of twinkling light
Sparkled with mirth! The sight
Fills me with frank surprise.

Piqued : The jest is fair, Miss Flight?
You've had your fun to-night.
Damsel of glorious gleams,
I've had a glimpse, it seems,
Not a look *right into* your eyes!

Lady, responsive : Lot of use your look in the eyes!
Shall Love be ever blind?
Can it not cross your mind
There's something with the prize—
The wit to raise the wind?
My suit is silver-lined.
Don't blink till all is blue.
The only way to woo
Is to look right into the eyes.

HEADSTRONG.

THERE are plenty of maids for your dress parades :
  There are numberless pleasing eyes :
(I should glint at a glance). Some girls can dance.
  But give me a head that's wise !

Yes, a girl with a head, who knows what's said :
  And why it was said—what it meant :
Whose sense can react to the touch of tact,
  Instinct with a high intent.

She knows what to do if e'er feeling blue :
  Can carry it off (all trace).
When wearing a hat she'll hardly let that
  Make her feel superfine in the face.

If by chance in the wrong, it will not be long
  Before she discovers the fact.
She'll be willing to show she has found it so
  And quite sorry she wasn't exact.

Her eyes won't be seen to have grown envy-green,
  For her thoughts rarely err from grace.
She is quick to detect the one way to select
  Any turn on the road of Life's race.

Though maidens refined chop and change their mind
(And trow it is nothing strange),
Mere man not so deft, when he finds himself left,
May reluctantly mind their change.

The girl with a heart may be likely to start
A throb or a thrill intense,
But she cannot compare with my lady fair,
' Some ' kid who has common sense.

There are women with charm who man's soul quite disarm.
For a few he might quicken his pace.
But he never would grouse at a nymph who has *nous*.
(Or so I imagine the case).

A SMACK AT SMOKE.

With grateful acknowledgements to DRS. LEONARD HILL and JOHN S. OWENS.

GIVE heed and hearken, ladies fair!
You seem to breathe a scented air
And bring a sense of Sunshine with soft eye-light:
(I'm more than grateful). 'Twould be grand
If you'd combine throughout the land
And really take this thing in hand:
I mean the lack of sky-light.

"A Brighter London"—Oh, the fog!
It breaks the current, slips a cog
In Metro's rounds of duty, dismal, undone:
And, supercharged with soot and germs,
It makes, if you'll excuse the terms,
Weak lungs delight for early worms.
Let Sunlight shine on London.

It can't be done? A 'meteor' man
Told me, indubitably it can!
So some fine day will dawn that won't be darkened
By gruesome grime that grows on smoke
Which, undestroyed in fires we stoke,
Hangs like a pall. If that's a joke,
Let Prince of Hatred's lark end.

Put off the dingy fold, for one.
Dear Child of Day, it can be done!
One has a lot to learn in sunlight saving.
Health-giving streams of limpid light
Were hardly meant to flash their flight
And fail to strike (however slight).
Electra's flag I'm waving.

A ready heat that has not fumed—
No sort of surplus unconsumed—
A sooner, saner, cooker saves all drudging.
If round the Realms of Light you range
(See radiant cities—note the change)
Then strike a blow at home—" It's strange
How Beauty's nose takes smudging."

FRACTURED FRIENDSHIP.

(The sound of a voice. . . .)

We are severed asunder. No more that bright passing the time of day
To one who is ever a-listen to hear what you have to say.
Mute voice, of a charm that ne'er changes—blithe spirit, since last you spoke
Winged words that live on like an echo, what 'vocal cord' broke?

Why cannot you treat me as kindly as once you were wont to do?
What is it so hinders you speaking to me as I want you to?
Could I have done aught to estrange you? Hearts bleed if they're not to blame.
I jib at such sentiment really: but still, all the same—

How long shall I look for, and miss you?—The sound of a voice that should last
Very soon will be heard, by the hour: (it will also be heard at half-past).
It's not right for a bird to be baffled. I've arranged for derangement to end.
Yes, you'll be OK this pip emma, dumb cuckoo-clock-friend.

SLIGHT THOUGHTS ON SLEEP.

It's nice to go to sleep,
  "To sleep, perchance to dream,"
Tho' rather hard to keep
  The thread of any theme
The visions of the night
  May bring the vacant brain.
And when you wake with morning light
  It's nice to sleep again.

Oh, Life, you have a lot
  Of joys from which to choose;
There's one I haven't got,
  The after-dinner snooze.
Since time is full of toil,
  Set off by pleasure's zest,
It seems a foolish thing to spoil
  An hour's delight with rest.

When weary of the day,
  It's time enough to drop
Your hold on work and play,
  And into bed to pop.
Then can you really cull
  Sleep's fresh and fragrant bloom.
And yet 'tis said that such a lull
  In life recalls the tomb!

But some will lie awake—
  At dead of night, a noise,
Their limbs begin to quake,
  They lose their equipoise.
And such I always find—
  At least, have always found—
Are not the men of sounder mind,
  Who never mind a sound.

It's pain to write like this.
  What must it be to read!
I'll take it not amiss
  Should you say what I need;
To wit, when seeming strange
  And not the man you were,
It's well for such an air of change,
  To try a change of air.

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM.

An echo of early days.

IN the years of youth, to whisper the truth,
It doesn't seem you care
If you go to—well, should a parson tell?
Or anywhere but there!

But as life goes on, and you light upon
A little common sense,
You may feel remorse, stop your reckless course,
And pause to count the expense.

D'you begin to say in a serious way—
"Is this fun I have taken part in?
I'll work for a wife, seek a nobler life
To make a proper start in."

And suppose you find; waste of time to mind
The past that is miles behind you.
As your star shines clear you will straitly steer
When wifely wit's inclined you.

But never forget there's a heaped up debt
You are down to discharge each day.
It is up to you to see that you do,
Or there's the Devil to pay!

THE END OF A PERFECT MINISTER.

THE Minister was ministering, and would not heed at all
The moving finger tracing out the writing on the wall.
He'd stay destroyer-steaming on a facile flowing tide,
With Pleasure placid at the helm; careless of Care beside.

In spite of sullen warnings from sane critics of the Press
He liked the speedy motion, and spurned to spend much less.
What booted it that there were rather fretted rocks in front?
The Ship of State might crumple, but the Public bear the brunt.

We wallowed in his wilful waste like wickedness (or sin).
He wanted an example set, to check his taste for tin.
The People were extravagant: now strictly they must hold
The reins of real retrenchment (and yet disburse their gold).

They might be hunger-bitten—hear their children cry for bread.
That's clearly a misfortune whose blame is on their head.
Could any one attribute such a state of things to me
Who freely mind the things of State, that fare so sumptuously?

An unknown Voice made answer in a tone removed from sweet:
'Twas icy in its *timbre*—"It's time to get chilled feet.
Put on the winter garment of Repentance like a shot,
Or you'll be shrouded also, when the word is Sack the lot."

September, 1921.

THE SPRING STEP.

HEARTS have jumped to feel the ichor juice of Spring,
Having donned the wear of brightness it will bring.
To observe the crescent crocus
Helps a dim sight into focus.
So a dumb soul's set in tune when song-birds sing.

Let me go, and see the sunshine's gladdest gleam
Over hill and vale and mirror-making stream.
With the murmur on the pebbles
Seems one's sense of music trebles.
Do not trouble if you wot not what may seem.

There's a time to catch young fancy on the wing.
Note the fashion. April fools may have a fling.
If in lieu of Love, one chooses
To invoke the vernal Muses,
Is not that a fair and comely kind of thing?

Say, no colour-combination could be seen
To transcend the white-blue waters banked with green?
Yielding sprucely sprouting spriglets,
Things of joy to jocund piglets
Or mild asses—and the kine are just as keen.

Then I love to see a lambkin on the hop—
Simply pine to watch a weasel deftly pop.
Tho' not one of your carousers,
I'm the blithest thing in trousers.
When *Pan* calls a tune to trip to, who can stop?

Can I hear him now in distant woodland ways?
What? A dream of old-world revels in these days!
Yes, his trope was rare and fruity
Who sang Truth's the same as Beauty,
Spotting transcendental music no one plays.

But, if Fancy really listens to Love's song
(As I hear it) in a valley far from wrong,
Comes thought-rapture (Oh, so thrilling)
At the throstles' coo and billing—
What may echo should the right Bird come along!

I would warble low the dawning of love light,
But I lack your ripe experience.—Am I right
Cupid's bow would bend for bulls-eyes
Once she woos with wink of full size?
I must look about for sheep's eyes in shy flight.

Every Spring there seems a stirring up of life,
But the best of all the joys that then are rife
Is the feeling that Spring's giving
You again the joy of living,
All alone, or (if she's willing) with a wife.

TRANSPORTED

AT THE SOUND OF A NAME THAT MUST THRILL.

STAGE MAIDEN of the charming chin,
From all the stall-ite batch
You *won't* recall a fellow thin,
Or thinnish as to thatch,
That night he drank your beauty in
—Except the beauty-patch.

We were but introduced by sight;
No word could I advance.
And you—you gave it back, my slight
And deferential glance,
Tendered across the soft footlight
During your dreamy dance.

How it recurs, the haunting strain!
One with your voice, the strings
Re-make their music in my brain—
What's in *a name*? It brings
You now to where we were again,
Borne upon memory's wings.

For moons and moons no star has shone
As when I saw you last.
The hands of Time must still move on—
This moment join the past.
A moment of sweet reverie gone?
Not much. I'll hold it fast.

It might have missed me by a mile,
Short memory being my shame,
But fate to-day with sudden smile
Has really played the game:
A nice new niece eyed me, and I'll
Be blest! she's got your name!

A PASSING THOUGHT.

A BEAUTIFUL thought passed thro' my mind,
  Rare Fancy-fraught.
In my fat head you would hardly find
  What Beauty taught; or so you thought, altho' you
    sought.
But the moon was blue, and the Muse was kind.
Such loveliness ought to be underlined
That by the eye of a brain purblind
      It could be caught.

It has too, a meaning, more or less,
  This beautiful thought.
But not on the meaning do I lay stress—
  It's really naught. But oh, I wrought (and so I ought)
To render the thought in language light,
The thought that I thought the other night,
That tongue might tell what a brilliant flight
      The Muse had brought.

Stupendous the words I had to woo.
  I did not shrink.
I relish a task that's done by few.
  And now I think, with pen and ink (to use for link)
The lovely delight must surely shine
Full into your mind of Muses nine.
If *you* can't feel it is worth that shrine,
      I fear a kink.

Can Memory e'er forget the thrill
  (I've thrilled a lot)
That thought infused in my soul until
  Its every spot was filled and not the slightest jot
Remained that might check the joy I knew?
And now for the fancy to tell to you.
Mirabile dictu. Is this true?
      It's fled my dot!

A DREAM NOTE FROM A NIGHTINGALE.

FEBRUARY 26th, 1921.

(Coming after a few furtive warblings on a threadbare theme).

A HINT of Spring! Each sprout rejoices.
Uplift your hearts, and raise your voices.
Bulbs begin to shoot.
As it were the welkin rings
To the sound of Song (on wings).
Bards in baggy trouserings
Follow suit.

He who feels the itch for striking
Cords that tremble to your liking
Has the frequent hump.
Now it is a fractured string
Stops the lute's accompanying,
Or the slight Castalian Spring
Feels a slump.

Still, if Sol be turning torrid,
Thoughts may pucker up the forehead.
And to give them birth,
Lo him rapt, the fluence on,
Jotting tropes with features wan,
Pensive till he hit upon
Words of worth.

Mystic thoughts he means to choke us
With come slowly into focus,
Taking time and skill.
Heavenly words you'd hardly think
Should be soiled by earthly ink—
Fairly drenched with dewy drink
(Muses' still).

Wingéd flights on flowers of FLORA :
Wondrous whispers re AURORA.
    Fancy has her fling,
Giving substance, more or less,
To a shadowy nothingness,
Clothing in yet fairer dress
    Dreams of Spring.

* * * * * *

Deep I drowsed mid scent of primrose.
Baby bubbles to a brim rose
    (Winking as they brake). . .
" Take and read the immortal strains "
Piped Philomel. " Line three contains
' . . .emptied some opiate to the drains.' "
    (My mistake)

" Morphian founts, that make you snooze, 'll
Snare your fancy with an ouzel
    —Leave poor PHIL unheard.
Psyche, Dian, and the Urn,
Gave JOHN'S muse a first-rate turn :
But the best that made him burn—
    I'm the bird!

" KEATS with ear for what is pretty
Lauded songs of silent ditty,"
    (Birds on bards is rum)
" Ask him—if he draws the line,
Truth from Beauty, quite so fine—
Will the Sun more *loudly* shine
    When Spring's come? "

LEFT-HANDED AND COMPLIMENTARY.

"Just a line" descriptive of Heart's Delight.

DEAR Mabel, with luck I am able
To pen you a sentence or two.
The writing is rather unstable,
But still, peradventure, 'twill do.
I make it a point to succeed
In doing whatever a man did.
So this you'll be able to read
Altho' writ left-handed.

Low level? Well how should I revel
With wrist in the hands of the nurse?
Doing nothing is frankly——:
(You know my strict views on strong verse!)
So simple a sample of news
Of what has occurred this vacation
I venture to think you'll excuse
With such explanation.

I want to extol first, Toronto—
Stayed there for a couple of days:
And then took the boat, and went on to
Niagara Falls—in their praise
One can't say enough. Have you scanned
Thro' a mist "*perfect* round" prism-pretty?
The Whirlpool, and Gorge too, are grand!
And quite a fair city.

"The Maid of the Mist" ventures nigh—
A stout little steamer for pleasure.
And as you look upward, the eye
Drinks its fill of that volume past measure,
Which thundering, wears down the curve
That is carved quite a foot every season.
In "the Cave of the Winds" you want nerve:*
Being *under*, there's breeze on.

*You may walk along a wet and slippery way actually under the Horse-shoe Fall.

Oasis of capital places,
I then took a trip to New York :
I failed to find tangible traces
Of princes whose power is pork.
But still one observed a good deal—
Ways of fun never witnessed in my land
" The Beauty Spot " made its appeal,
And famed Coney Island !

Expended a week : it was splendid—
Much money, what's more; which was not !
Returned to the Lake-side, and then did
St. Lawrence, and Rapids. We got
Very nearly as far as the best
On the River—a hitch, and we had to
Go slow (by the locks) for the rest
O' the voyage. Too bad, too.

Splashed money ! It *is* rather funny
To spend it as freely as that.
But there ! if you don't take the honey
Of life—well, it falls a bit flat.
And that is the reason I stayed,
Ere so charming a holiday ended,
A day at ' The Windsor ', and paid
As Plutus-befriended.

Well dearest, this is but the merest
Account of gay things I have done.
'Twill give an idea not the clearest
Of the sort and extent of my fun.
Mayhap you'll agree, I did well.
With your counsel I might have done better.
There you are (as you were) then, Ma Belle.
And thanks for your letter.

IN THE WAY OF HAPPINESS.

Some notes, we are told, are too high to be heard by human ears, just as some thoughts of the mystic mind are too utter to utter. I speak with all respect. So one can hardly think KEATS was kidding when he called unheard melodies sweet.* There must have been some subtle music in that sensitive mind beyond the range of ordinary audition. What that melody was one cannot hope to guess. Of course, one sees the particular application in his poem. But he seems to have thought of unheard music as a familiar fact. As some have the gift of second-sight Mr. KEATS may have had the sense of second-hearing. However, on a lower scale, the music of verse we know, and some lyric lines have an added virtue of music, so that through the rise and fall of vowel sounds (apart from the rhyme) in pleasing sequence the sense of tonic harmony is achieved. The present lyrist being unable to set words to music, through absence of requisite faculty, yearns to experiment in the possibility of setting music to words, so that, with luck, lines may seem to sing themselves by the very intonation of the natural voice. The effect may quite fail to convince, but at least the intention is well-meaning. In the frequent phrase of the moment—"Here you are then!"

VANITY WALK.

LADY, as I look at you, the soul of beauty lies
In those sad eyes
Of extra size.
Tell me, then, what I can do:
For I would rescue two
From feeling blue.
Now do advise!

*Lovers of Light Verse will have read a modern "J. K.," whose double-barrelled pen-name is repeatedly and emphatically the reverse of MUD (one speaks *literally* with highest regard and due respect)—a maker of mirth, whose fame is not writ in water, but in ink of exceptionally indelible print.

Lady Loq :—I'll walk awhile with Will,
Set up by drill, and dressed to kill.
Aloof from cares that cark,
We'll ambulate the Park,
Alert for Love's young lark.

As sunny rays arise
(And young men's fancy ties)
No more a sough of sighs!
No bird will lilt so lightly:
No sister seem unsightly:
No sprout will feel more sprightly.
Now pass remark!

My word :—FRYLFRYL, I can't stroll with you, for fear
[our friendship froze.
Per tilted toes
The way's to woes.
Oh, how much I marvel you
Could stoop to stilts. It's true
You're made to woo:
But not in those!

Crescendo Did Trilby try high heels?
True Art appeals. The false congeals
Love's fervour like a frost,
And all her labour's lost:
Vain woman's double-crossed.
Man's sense of beauty craves
The natural line and waves.
What wives are fashion's slaves?
This heart, how e'er so plastic
Won't fall to feet fantastic.
You'll fall—flat boots (elastic)!
So count the cost.*

*It is definitely stated by Doctors that high heels, by loosening the ligaments, bring on flat feet.

SAFETY FIRST.

DREAM maidens, when you're dressed to kill,
  One's lured to look your way.
But don't you run a risk of chill
  With sample charm display?
So striking weapons (tried and true)
Attest your strength of 'will to woo.'

Much less equipped in arms you wield,
  Man's taken by surprise—
May feel the need of shock-proof shield
  For rapid-fire from eyes!
Ere now I've had to blink girls' gaze
Unless it's only 'blank' they blaze.

It is not safe to talk alone!
  The liquid flame of voice
Sets up another danger-zone.
  Man's reft of freedom's choice.
The tongue is terrible to tame:
But you, it seems, have learnt the game!

When travelling by 'bus or train
  (Always inclined to jolt)
Why danger-points instinct with pain?
  From out the blue a bolt!
In meek amaze I ask you, why!
Are hat-pins *meant* to catch my eye?

Unless that dagger wears a sheath,
  What tho' your eyes are Art,
I overlook lure underneath
  A hat to reach the heart.
One cannot revel in the view
And have a sense of safety too.

SELF-DEFENCE.

THERE are who wish to help you on Life's way.
You've met the same yourself just once or twice?
Would cast their wings around you (so to say),
And such familiarity's not nice.
The cap, I fear, will many fit:
They like to give the benefit
Of some silly, unsolicited, advice.

Advice is freely given, but its use
Is very, very doubtful as a rule:
The wise man doesn't need it—too obtuse
To understand its benefit, the fool.
To anger *I*'ve been driven
By good words too freely given!
And in time I get such temperature to cool.

It's not as though I minded *their* affairs—
These people who take interest in me.
I hardly think there's any one who cares
Less if they sprint Life's race, or merely spree.
With quite the best intentions
Their love transcends dimensions.
Why I should draw such fire I fail to see.

But how to steel myself to their attack
  And still as well preserve my self-respect?
I couldn't counsel *them*. I've not the knack;
  Nor would I so outrage my intellect.
    A cure too rough-and-ready's in
    A dose of their own medicine:
But were it tried, it might have some effect.

It might, with luck, do something to prevent
  Them trying on their trying airs. Agree?
It's possible they'd have the sense to scent
  That all was not just as it ought to be.
    But there! I couldn't do it.
    So I must worry through it,
Till Fate sees fit to alter such decree.

THE TEAR.

A MAIDEN tries to stop it when it starts;
For it's a sign of weakness you'll agree.
It is apt to come to those with stoutest hearts
And show a touch of nature plain to see.
It has even caused a measure of dismay
When it rises to proportions unexpected.
And a man will be advised if he looks the other way
When the fissure in her stocking is detected.

SPRING VOICES.

In Canadian Vein.

List!—Frogs 'love-whistling' round the ponds!
  Glad birdlets bill and coo above.
A branchlet, bristling with fresh fronds,
  Breaks at the vibrant voice of love.
The rivulet again is wet
  After the frost before . . .
I sigh and fret for days not yet
  When life is less a bore.
Say, something simmers in my soul; tho' what I can't be sure.

The Sun is thrilling to the veins:
  It sends a sense of vital vim.
The bardlet's filling soul regains
  The *joie de vivre* of Sunny Jim.
Fresh fields and sky make glad the eye.
  Lambs echo heart's rebound.
I can't say why my throat is dry.
  Ah, there, that whispering sound
In clearer accents than before. Yes, Sir! the Muse I've found.

A SERIOUS QUESTION.

WHAT is a joke? It's hard to say.
It takes you in a poignant way
That's highly pleasant.
But just exactly what is done
When something strikes the mind as fun,
I must admit that I, for one,
Can't say at present.

It lets a light within the mind
Of joy that will not be confined,
"A sudden glory."
We know one virtue in it lies
In having something of surprise.
And not infrequently its guise
Is woful story.

But *what* is it that makes the face
Get so absurdly out of place—
The mouth a chasm?
What nerves of feeling do you reach,
You humourists that make us screech?
And what is in the funny speech
To cause a spasm?

This question of the humourous touch
I must confess intrigues me much.
Had I the money,
I'd go to those that play the part,
That know the depths of Humour's heart;
And have some lessons in the art
Of being funny.

A GOOD LIFE

AND A GAY ONE (IN BRIGHTER LONDON).

MERELY a motto (for me),
  Live at a smartish pace,
Pluck at the plums from Life's tree,
  Smiling about the place—
Glean from dull days any measure of glee,
  (Running, of course, the race).

Curious! a thought has occurred:—
  Did each but foster his forte,
Every young dog (or gay bird)
  Proving a pro. of their sort—
Deft in the dance—quite the ultimate word
  Haply in stage-craft or sport—

Tinting life's bubble, in turn,
  Each would help colour the whole.
Lights would so shine, one should learn
  Lots to enliven the soul.
Stir up a gift (you have got it)—nor spurn
  Making a sprint for the goal.

Say—have you itched for Art?
  Do you not pine to paint?
Soon as you've made the start,
  Strike out, with less restraint—
Futurist literature wells in your heart?
  (That must be my complaint).

Yet I'm a stranger to fame.
  True, it should be confessed
I, who so urge the game,
  Haven't the ghost of a quest.
Really, one must make some sort of a name.
  Dash it, I'll be well-dressed!

CAVE WIT.

In ages ere writing was written—the dawn of the dimmest
of days,
When the arts and the crafts were undreamt of, and even
the making of lays,
Was man marked with a species of humour? Did he
laugh when his cave-fellow spoke
In a manner that we might call witty, a passable joke?

The mind, then but crudely developed, perchance hadn't
come to the stage
Of enjoying a joke, tho' a good one (no pain from a pun
in that age).
Did one happen to say something jolly—a *mot* of the first-
water wit,
Was their pleasure—applause for the jester? Or did he
get hit?

There's a saying (and Solomon said it) "There's nothing
new under the sun."
Were the jests that *we* know born at that time, their
earliest forms then begun?
Did they chortle at chestnuts in those days? revive them
again in the Ark?
To leave upon subsequent ages perennial mark.

'Tis a question of hazy solution; you might say if you spoke on the spot—
There isn't a great deal against it—in its favour may be quite a lot :
That they had some idea of the playful; less subtle, no doubt, then than now.
But still 'twas our wit in the making, I think you'll allow.

Yes, Life! half your pleasure is humour! A medicine that's salve for the soul,
It carries (most) out of the shadows : the salt 'tis that seasons the whole.
I cannot imagine without it how else man could scatter life's mist.
With me, there is no doubt about it—I'd barely exist.

CLIPPED WINGS.

WITH any luck, to-day will bring some sight
To lure the soul, and lend the heart delight—
A glimpse of gleamland in a world of grey
(Glad eye?)—whose glint turns mist to rainbow spray.
Not sought, but found—a sight of joy be struck,
With any luck.

With any luck, to-night will yield the touch
Of Friendship's hand-grip (under-valued much)—
Romantic meeting, say, to mutual good
Of swain and maid. In youth's enchanted wood
Some swan may learn he's not an ugly duck,
With any luck.

With any luck a strain of music clear
May lift the soul to Heaven's seventh sphere,
And stir heart-strings responsive to such thrill—
Strengthening man's taste for Life's more bitter Pill.
Music hath charms to charge the chest with pluck
With *any* luck.

With any *luck* a wandering wonder-thought!—
Mute aspiration high as Folly caught
In halcyon days ere Fortune wore a frown—
To wit, the Reader may not turn this down—
For once the enclosed stamped envelope stay unstuck!
No sort of luck!

MAIDEN OF MIRTH.

A song without a tune.

MAIDEN of Mirth, you make the eye grow brighter
When o'er the mind your influence is shed :
Maiden of Mirth, the footstep feels far lighter
Once it is trod in time with your light tread.
Maiden of Mirth, you bless the heart that's broken
Bringing both balm and bliss in your bright smile.
Maiden of Mirth, we tender you a token,
Learn how we love to be with you awhile !

Refrain—

Angel of Mirth, throned in the Realm of Laughter,
Thrilling the heart with thoughts new born of joy,
Queen of the Earth, and too, the bright Hereafter,
Come let us have a laugh without alloy !
Maiden of Mirth, your rapture crowns the daytime :
At night the same, no hour with you is dead—
Giving fresh worth, real pleasure to man's playtime,
Brightening the brains of every cheerful head.
Come jolly maid ! with Humour at your side;
Stir up the staid, and leave us laughter-eyed.

Maiden of Mirth, you're friends with every mortal :
High-born or low, it matters not a bit.
Lords of the Earth invite you thro' their portal.
Is there a soul that welcomes not your wit ?
Maiden of Mirth, you lend an added lustre
To brilliant minds—the brightest that there are :
And from their birth you live in all the muster
Of merry maidens born beneath Mirth's star.

GLEAMLAND.

GIVE me the days of Sunshine!
If clouds obscure the sky
The flow'r of joy seems faded,
The wine of life runs dry.
But soon the Sun gleams gladness,
Then all reflects his ray.
No more a sense of sadness:
Dark doubts dissolve away!

Life's charm consists in changes.
If gay, 'tis dismal too.
It may be, any moment,
The day is dark for you!
But mists of bitter trouble
Must turn to rainbow spray:
And Life's a brighter bubble
For those which break to-day.

Love points the path to Gleamland.
It paints a radiant light
Of sunshine over daytime—
Of moonshine over night.
Mayhap the Moon of Honey
Has yet its course to run.
Your hours will then be sunny
In Love's unsetting sun.

Refrain—

Shine, Sun, Shine! Kindle kind eyes to-day.
Clear rays, shine! Come to one's life, to stay!
Shine, sun, do! Make any Cloud look bright. . . .
Man's hopes are high when Heaven's eye
Awakes the world to light.

THE ETERNAL QUEST.

FUN without folly!
That would be jolly:
Pleasure without regret:
Happiness always,
Even in small ways:
Is it not possible yet?
Now on Life's way with the worst of it past
Is there no chance for just joy to last?

Care without worry,
Calm without flurry,
Cannot we make them our own?
Why is there measure
To everyone's pleasure?
Could trouble not let us alone?
That is the question that waits a reply.
The answer, I fear may be simply a sigh.

Seek for the beauty
In life, but it's duty
Urges a prior claim!
Hardly a minute
While some are in it
But they're a slave to the same.
Day after day the perpetual toil
May weigh down the soul and the spirit spoil.

Still if you're clever
And really endeavour
To get at the very best
That life can show you,
'Tis well. I trow you
Won't feel you've quite failed in your quest.
Forgetful of self, and by means indirect,
What you seek you'll find—rather more, I expect.

LAST LEAP YEAR, 1920.

Miss Dimplesome; your note to hand,
In which you more than hint
I might be yours. Please understand
I turned a fitting tint.
Just in the nick of time! It's funny
How nigh fulfilled was Leap Year's phase.
But can you keep me with your money?
Are you a girl of golden traits?

The bard who toils, and spins his stuff
With output by the inch,
Is overdrawn—not dross enough
For one—ah, there's the pinch!
I'd wed, could I afford a trousseau,
And link our lives in lots of bliss,
But, failing dibs, I cannot do so.
Plutus or Plato; that or this.

With great respect, you're quite a sport;
'The goods' to make a wife—
A spinster of the nobler sort
That sprint the Race of Life.
Alas the luck that I'm a loser—
Must now perforce such pearl let slip!
Another beggar can't be chooser:
You have the lemon, I the pip.

But *you* it seems, swift make the choice!
Selected me at sight:
Soon pressed your suit—not mine the voice,
This tongue was reined in tight.
'Twas your glad look—as spark to tinder
Calm hazel eyes set heart aglow.
Then straight it turned to softish cinder—
Mere dust and ashes—minus 'dough.'

I blame you not. I blame myself:
I shrivel at my shame,
That one so poor at pouching pelf
Can never play Love's game.
The world is wide: You've but to woo, you
Quite soon should find a moneyed mate.
And I, I'll be a brother to you.
To that I'd never hesitate.

GAS CONSUMPTION.

[In 1921, of 500,000 consumptives, 75,000 were Londoners. The folly of breathing impure smoke-laden air in the open is far surpassed by the misery and danger of putting up with foul air indoors. Dr. JOHN S. OWENS, of the Air Ministry advocating smokeless fuel in the *Times* writes :— "we are very particular about the purity of our food and water, and take very little trouble to see that the air we breathe is pure." He very kindly approved the following lines, as being sound from a scientific point of view.]

WHAT *Cure* is that one has heard about—
The scourge of Consumption put to rout?

With due regard, and if one might preach,
The cure *and prevention* rests with each.

The foul-air fiend consumes his prey,
But Blood and Oxygen win the day.

They build a system immune to germs :
And force each microbe to sue for terms.

Secure from trouble to throat or lung
You lift up your voice with rosy tongue

And laugh at persons of closure class
Who, shutting all windows, encase in glass!

Like Papers, superior people would
Envisage their circulation's good.

And drink pure air till it goes to the head,
Inflaming the blood to a richer red.

You cannot forget (it seems so sure)
The thicker the air, the thinner the gore.

You've rushed from a room to get your breath?
And left the unsensitive courting death,

Not minding density (or is it mass?)
Inhaling for air, sheer poison-gas.

And how can a doctor pull them through
When so addicted to CO_2?

Then raise the wind—. . . (But theatres begin) *
And let air Wings of Happiness in.

*Would the halls of music, more ancient than modern, take the hint? For instance, the Queen's Hall, not to mention many sacred edifices, unedifying in this respect.

VERSE AND REVERSE.

THANK you Spring! Fancy turns, and discerns
Facial Features that were magnet in a mate.
Poets leap to pluck the lute:
Tho' the stuff to give their suit
Is the order of the boot
Big with fate.

Solar rays now in flood stir the blood.
Their reflection adds an interest to eyes.
And you wonder what is wrong
As the colour comes out strong,
Loud as larks in bursts of song,
Scaling skies.

Arcadie (which Arcade?) finds the maid:
I am prompted to sing praise she might deplore.
One could hardly, e'en in prose,
Rave of sweetest bloom that blows,
Marvelling what makes such nose
Sometimes snore.

Can one quite clearly speak of a cheek
Like the cherry, ripe with rapture (for her choice)?
Tho' the wind, dry from the South,
Made a tendency to drouth
There'd be water in the mouth
Drowning voice.

How refer to the wear of her hair?
Is it permanently 'waved,' or will it wilt?
Should young Strephon yearn, he must
Risk the chance his hopes may rust
Or Life's bubble joys be bust
By a jilt.

But her mouth!—tender sheath for such teeth
As would make you turn the cheek to her sharp tongue.
Cupid's frequent bow has hit:
One's received the frozen mitt:
So I may as well be bit!
I've been stung.

Further charm? It appears in her ears,
Free of pendants (and of freckles)—crinkled grace:
Scarce a crease in creamy skin—
Frankly single as to chin.
From her hat no danger-pin
Out of place.

Stuff enough! For the rest, it's suppressed.
Haply fancy lilts the laughter that may rise
As She reads the coy confession
Of the writer's prepossession—
The quite hopeless love expression
She'll despise.

THE SONG OF THE CURATE

[Commended, without demur, to the notice of the Executive of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.]

With features faded and worn,
  With eyes the colour of lead,
A curate sat, in a fifth-rate flat,
  Earning his children's bread.
"Give! give! give!
  For bread will they give a stone?"
The Vicar pleads: for his curate's needs—
  They seem so like his own.

Work—work—work
  With the Staff at half its strength;
And work—work—work
  With sermons the usual length.
Club, and visit, and 'sick,'
  'Sick,' and visit, and club.
If over the traces he tried to kick
  He'd probably get a snub.

O men with money to burn,
  Who *can* support your wives,
It's not his pocket you're wearing out,
  But joy from human lives!
It's "O! to be free from care
  Along with the parish clërk
(Who has his fees, enough and to spare)
  If this is Christian work."

Work—work—work
  The fluent speaking flags.
And what is the stipend, in time of War?
  Ask the collection bags.
No rise in the paltry scale
  That shamed him in days of Peace!
No marvel that poor young curates pale
  At income-tax increase!

Work—work—work
From Sunday chime to chime.
Work—work—work—
Your rest-day overtime!
No sweet and blessed words—
Sweat-labour, wages, sin.
"Don't blink the fact, but up and act!"
(I heard a voice within)

With features faded and worn,
With eyes the colour of lead,
A curate sat, in a fifth-rate flat,
Earning his children's bread.
Give! Give! Give!
For bread will you give a stone?
A Vicar pleads for his curate's needs.
Happy the parish that really heeds!
It seems unlike my own.

August, 1918.

IN HARNESS.

I met a cart-horse on Life's road.
  "Good-morning, Horse!" I said.
"The way is long with such a load?
  He brightened, being well-bred.
Address a horse, if not too shy—
And watch him look you in the eye.

Confront a cow about to think,
  With ruminating chews,
You'll find no sort of answering blink
  Or interchange of views.
Horse sense, thro' work, is fairly keen:
The cow's mere grazing leaves her green.

The reader now may pass remark
  "Such logic's somewhat loose.
I hardly feel disposed to hark
  To what you'll thence deduce—"
As though I'm one to look for laurels
By going about and musing morals!

Blink, Pegasus! and say you see—
  Some, with the cow, are blind?
They do no work like you (or me)
  To make them more refined:
But men with grit, who force the pace,
May grow in wit's quite saving grace.

RANDOM SHAFTS?

IN me, please find, a man of means.
  And tho' they fail to prop
I'm definitely full of beans
  Since any change or chop—
Alert for life in subtler ways—
  Allured by inner beauty:
(It may be radiant in the plays
  Whose fare is fresh and fruity).

Have some a thirst for high estate
  And wanton winter wear?
Graft me no trappings of the Great!
  I trace no merit there.
One learns—the heights of 'living's art'
  May find in *depths* their level.
A wight I wot, when 'in the cart'
  Is most inclined to revel!

He fights fond, false, and dismal guise
  By dealing blows of blame.
No matter if his credit dies—
  The guy must play the game.
He senses joy in serious days;
  And, if he sees no sin in
The mien of men of taste, he'll gaze
  On purple and fine linen.

Myself, I really cannot care
To tilt at naughty nobs.
It's better, much, to raise the air
For windmills wanting jobs*
To fan the wheels of failing trade
By taxing income taxers.
Must *still* Amusement yield State aid?
When put that extra back, Sirs?

And if the Race is rationed yet
Regards the right to fun,
Why not pull up the sinful set
Who put and take, and run?
What's really frankly *infra dig.*
Shall fail to rouse rebuker!
(Give me a boss who's far too big
To pouch his neighbour's lucre).

I'm quite fulfilled of faults, I know:
And so might have the grace
To grovel in the grass below,
And keep a proper place.
But still, it's clear such clod can claim
(That way untempted)—I've ease
About the need to dodge a name
That sounds the least like DIVES.

December, 1921.

*Mr. 'Windmill Man' please note!

RETORT COURTEOUS.

(To one of the Ecclesiastical Commission).

Come, Pegasus, with wings and hoof,
And tread with halcyon balm
A quiet measure of reproof:
This quill would raise a qualm
In L.S.D. who holds aloof
In lapped Olympian calm.

Firmly entrenched in high estate(s)
What should he reck of rights
Of rank and file—who at his gates
Lay grievance, luckless wights?
His word is law, nor jot abates—
What he has writ, he writes.

The voice of Reason caught his ear.
The argument was sound.
(Ecclesiastics made it clear
In conclave gathered round).
Should proper prestige seem too dear
To lose, though Honour's found?

Yet, I admire the way he's said—
'Should circumstance arise'
He'd grant a meeting (head-to-head).
'Tis generally wise
To admit another's view, instead
Of cramping cranium size.

January 4th, '22.

DATE DUE

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